



NEWS RELEASE

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WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FORMER KC MUNICIPAL JUDGE SENTENCED FOR FRAUD FOR TAKING MONEY FROM ATTORNEYS

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that a former Kansas City, Mo., municipal court judge was sentenced in federal court today for a fraud scheme that involved soliciting money from attorneys and others, including attorneys with cases in which she presided.

Deborah A. Neal, 54, of Kansas City, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Howard F. Sachs this morning to two years and four months in federal prison without parole. Graves noted that today's sentence reflects an upward departure from the federal sentencing guideline recommendations.

Neal was appointed as a Municipal Court Judge for Kansas City on May 17, 1996, and resigned from that position on Nov. 3, 2004.

"With this tough sentence, the court recognized that no one, not even a judge, is above the law," Graves said. "The defendant's conduct in this case brought disrepute to Kansas City's municipal court system, as well as other judges and courts. Today's sentence should send a strong message to deter public officials from wrongdoing, but just as important, it should help restore our community's faith in the integrity of the judicial system."

On May 3, 2005, **Neal** pleaded guilty to mail fraud. Graves explained that **Neal** was charged with fraud because she devised a scheme to defraud citizens by depriving them of the right to the honest services of Kansas City municipal court judges.

"**Neal** received nearly \$36,000 from at least 17 attorneys and three bonding companies," Graves said, "as well as tickets for concerts and sporting events. Most of those loans ranged from \$1,000 to \$5,000. There is evidence indicating that **Neal** provided favorable treatment to some of the attorneys who had made loans to her. Some attorneys felt compelled to make the loans to

Neal out of fear of economic harm to themselves or their clients. Neal's actions even affected the courthouse employees who were aware of her actions, because they were sometimes forced to arrange for the delivery of loans and were shamed and embarrassed by such unethical and illegal conduct."

Neal began soliciting and receiving loans soon after she was appointed to the municipal bench, and continued doing so for about eight years until shortly before she resigned. She repaid about \$10,300 of those loans, leaving approximately \$23,650 in unpaid loans at the time of her resignation. Many of the attorneys who made loans, Graves added, are undergoing disciplinary investigations. Because of the confidentiality of those proceedings, their names have not been released to the public.

"For many citizens, municipal court is their only real contact with the judicial system," Graves said. "Attorneys and defendants have a right to expect a level playing field. A system in which some lawyers have secret financial deals with a judge is fundamentally unjust. The judicial system for which **Neal** showed such contempt will now hold her accountable for her actions."

In addition to soliciting and receiving loans, **Neal** also admitted that she gave preferential treatment to certain attorneys and their clients.

On one occasion, **Neal** used her ruling in a case as an opportunity to solicit and receive a loan from an attorney who had been charged as a defendant with a municipal ordinance violation. In November 2002, a case in which the defendant was an attorney was transferred to her division. "**Neal** found that defendant not guilty after presiding over the trial," Graves said. "A few months later, she solicited and received a \$5,000 loan from that defendant – a loan she never repaid."

The federal information charged that **Neal** also caused other criminal cases to be transferred from the dockets of other judges to her, and changed conditions of probation for the defendants represented by attorneys who had made loans to her. Some attorneys who made loans to **Neal** were granted unescorted access to what is supposed to be a secure area leading to the municipal judges' chambers.

In the spring of 2000, **Neal** dismissed approximately 41 traffic citations that had been issued to a defense attorney. "This was done without the knowledge or consent of the city prosecutor," Graves said. **Neal** fraudulently caused the computer number of an assistant city prosecutor to be entered on the dismissal of these traffic citations on a date on which the assistant prosecutor was not working.

The specific act of mail fraud to which **Neal** pleaded guilty, Graves explained, involves the Public Report of Extra-Judicial Income that she mailed from Kansas City to the Clerk of the Missouri Supreme Court in Jefferson City, Mo., on April 16, 2001. As a municipal judge, **Neal** was required by the state's Code of Judicial Conduct to report any loans over \$100 in the annual Public Reports of Extra-Judicial Income. That 2001 report had the material omission of at least one loan over \$100 – a \$5,000 loan **Neal** received from an attorney who sometimes practiced before her.

Neal also omitted the loans from court filings when she filed for bankruptcy in June 2000, Graves added, and tried to conceal those loans from others.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney J. Daniel Stewart. It was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow